

## CASE STUDY: FORDHAM UNIVERSITY

**IT Leader:** Dr. Frank Sirianni, Ph.D., CIO

**Talent Strategy:** DevOps, process design, and cloud vendor management abilities are most in-demand at this private New York City university. However, what has tempered the flow of qualified candidates – at Fordham and for all employers – is the “commodification” of IT. The result is a mismatch between prospective employees’ short-term-value skills – skills that are commodities with a short shelf life – and the prospects’ own desire for the advancement, benefits and prestige of a long-term institutional employer.



This mismatch is compounded by the high expectations of millennials, the young professionals that employers look to fill their ranks. In many cases, they are less willing to do the same thing year over year, and less keen on using traditional (face-to-face) methods to collaborate.

To attract and retain these professionals, and to help overcome the gaps, Sirianni and team focus on three key areas: feedback, training and a deep sense of purpose.

### Power Points:

- **Focus on the how and why.** Sirianni and team introduced a performance management system that doesn't just focus on goals, but on how these goals will be accomplished with the talent at hand and why a given initiative is important to the entire university.
- **Offer internal as well as external training opportunities.** Fordham's IT staff can take advantage of a lot of external training opportunities, such as Pathways from the CIO Executive Council (CEC); the university also invests in the Regional Leadership Forum (RLF) from Society for Information Management (SIM) that focuses on topics like “how to get to yes” and “emotional intelligence.” Additionally, the university launched its own IT Laureate Program that allows selected cohorts of the IT staff to engage in program activities such as individual coaching, problem-solving “action learning groups,” and individualized assessments.
- **Promote a sense of purpose.** Fordham is part of a network of Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States. IT leaders have been drawn to “two leadership forums which are intended specifically for non-clergy who are in leadership roles here to learn more about our values.” The sense of mission permeates the organization, is attractive to millennials, and also contributes to retention, Sirianni reports.

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**Last Word:** “As a university, Fordham must manage a “value vector that relates to culture: the creation, preservation and transmission of knowledge and culture. That, believe it or not, appeals to people very significantly.” These intentional and situational programs also allow IT people to “develop respect for their colleagues. They get better connected to Fordham IT and their university colleagues, and act as a very significant retention item.”